

**William Short to Thomas Jefferson, March 17,
1823, from the Thomas Jefferson and William Short
Correspondence, Transcribed and Edited by Gerard W.
Gawalt, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress**

William Short to Thomas Jefferson

Philadelphia March 17. 1823

Dear Sir

Contrary to all precedent I have by me a letter from you which has remained for two months unanswered. I have been silent only because I feared to give you trouble. I know how laborious it is for you now to write & I have always known how unwilling you were to employ an amanuensis. Yet I am not the less anxious to hear that you are perfectly restored to the use of your arm, & have retained your general health. When you last were so kind as to write to me (Dec. 29) the prospect was not favorable. I indulge the hope that the prospect has been realized.

I saw with great pleasure, because I know how much pleasure it would give you, that the last legislature has been much more enlightened & liberal to the University than its predecessor. Every contribution which they made in this way, I consider as an additional pledge for their perseverance in the good path; & I hope you will live to see the good fruit produced by it. Yet it is certain that this establishment has many & most dangerous foes to contend against-none more so than those who appear to me to be a compound of what in Catholic countries composed Jesuitism & Jansenism two principles so opposite that it could never have been expected that they could be united, & wch. nothing but Calvinism could unite.

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If you take any interest in what is going on beyond the Atlantic, I have no doubt that interest is highly excited by the present attitude of France & Spain. I judge from the effect which it produces on me who have so long condensed all attention to what is going on in the political world.

I was so egregiously mistaken in the opinion which I found

at the time, of the success of the Duke of Brunswick when in a position similar to that of the Duke d'Angoulene at present, that I should not venture to have an opinion now [at present] if I were not supported in it by one of Napoleon's favorite Generals who was engaged in the Peninsula war-but yet he & I may both be mistaken. For as to my opinion of the success of the Duke of Brunswick, I was supported in that also by I believe every impartial military man in Europe & I had moreover a full ocular demonstration of the public feeling in France; having travelled through it on my way to Holland at that moment. And notwithstanding this (what an humiliation to the reason of proud man!) there was not a whiskey drinker in any of the grog shops of Philadelphia, a thousand leagues from the scene, who did not, both drunk & sober, form a more accurate judgment of the result than I did on the spot, with all the force of my mind bent on the examination of the subject.

As to the public feeling in France at that time, of which I speak, it would be idle & worse than useless for me now to describe it-for my best friends would not believe it was as I really saw it. The change was total & as sudden as that of a scene at the Opera & as this change made it what friends at a distance had pronounced it to be, without seeing or knowing anything about it, nothing is so natural as that they should insist on the triumph of this lucky guess, insist that there had been no change & attribute all to their own penetration. Yet the same kind of change had taken place in a contrary sense at Amsterdam a few years before, after the entry of the Prussians. The same at Brussels at a later period. In passing through that City on my way to Holland all the Belgic Provinces were in such a state of patriotic fermentation, breathing victory or death & infinite danger to any individual who should have expressed a doubt on the subject, that I could scarcely

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believe my own eyes or ears, when returning through Brussels two short months after that, I saw & heard nothing but Austrian signals & rage & horror against Van Eupen & all his followers. Now what produced

this magical change? Nothing but the magic of success. And I still believe, however absurd it may appear at this day, that if the Duke of B. had made a rapid march on Paris, he would have arrived there without very great loss & if he had arrived there & got possession of the person of Louis 16 I will adventure to say what I have always believed & still believe would have been the consequence.

Should the Duke of A now persue a different course, arrive at Madrid & also get possession of the person of the adored Ferdinand, this may enable us to form a better conjecture. It is really painful to have ones opinions & wishes so directly opposed to each as mine are on this subject. If the war is to be carried on in the ordinary way between the Governments of France & Spain I see no chance for the sucessful resistance of Spain, & every prospect that Ferdinand will again be allowed to re-enter on his blood & revengeful career.

There is a remedy however I firmly believe, but whether the Cortes will not think it worse than the disease I cannot say. It would be immediately to pronounce the deccheance of Ferdinand & take possession of him & his family in all its branches, as hostages-call a Convention to be elected under the present excitement, wch. would insure the election of such men as the French Convention if to be found—that is to say the greatest scoundrels & men of the greatest energy, who have everything to gain & nothing to lose but their lives; wch. they do not value. At the same time address Louis 18 in a language somewhat like this—“We had determind to make the experiment of a constitutional Monarchy with Ferdinand at our head. Had you left us to ourselves the experiment would have been fairly made, & he would have been probably placed in a situation similar to that in which you are, by the Charter which you in your wisdom have “octroye” to France. It has pleased you to decide otherwise as to Spain, & as at this moment marching & powerful army to invade

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& “souiller” the territory of constitutional Spain. Well aware that we cannot resist this army with Ferdinand as the head of our government, & with all

his predilections & wishes in favor of the enemy, we have had no alternative left, & we have thought no guide so safe as to follow the example so lately furnished us by the brave French nation under similar circumstances. We have therefore pronounced the decheance of Ferdinand. We will not follow the example further in instituting a prosecution before the Representatives of the Nation. A trial of the kind necessarily presupposes a determination to condemn. We will not make his life to depend on the judgment of those who may be supposed excited to take it. We adopt a course wch. you at least ought to consider as more humane. We make his life to depend on you. & we now say to you that the decree is passed & irrevocable which ordains that his life shall be forfeited & the execution follow the first moment of intelligence being recieved that your army has passed the frontier. And thus if he die let his death be on your head.”

If this were to be acted on by L. 18 of himself I believe it would suffice to stop his army. Indeed of himself I equally believe he would never have put his army in motion, but with some of the madness with whom he has unfortunately become surrounded it would probably have less effect, if Any to them. Under the influence of the persons wch. excite them, they would be inclined (for les satires des peres sort perdues peu leas enfants) to apply to Ferdinand what the advisers of the French Princes made them write to the paragraph L.16-when they were in safety on the Rhine, & their unhappy brother in the hands of his enemies. “Sir: Ne transigez paint avec le crime. Les montres n'aeront jamais porter avec le crime sen votre personne sacree” &c.

But my dear sir, here is a great deal of speculation & of idle speculation I may say, since every day may bring us accounts to shew that all speculation is at an end.

I remember in a former letter you said O fortunate mercaterer. I think if you were here now you would recall this. There is a degree of mercantile distress that is really alarming. My

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paper does not leave me room to mention to you instances wch. have passed under by eyes of families thought the most wealthy, now reduced to nothing. No class seems to me more reduced, except the great landholders of the State of NYork. My friend LeRay of whom I have formerly spoken to you, & who seems to have transported a French Chateau, or Chimode of living, on the borders of Lake Ontario, is now considered as ruined. I am almost alarmed myself from being the forced owner of three large tracts of land in that State. They force me also to visit them. I go this summer to see the third wch as yet I have never seen, but I have to be back in time to go & see you & assure you ???.

RC (Jefferson Papers, DLC)